WAR INC. – P10 • GAZA GATEWAY – P14 • SCARY CHRISTIANS – P18

THE INDYPENDENT
#289 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2024

DAVID HOLLENBACH

BUH-BYE

THE RISE AND FALL OF ERIC ADAMS AND WHAT COMES NEXT

COVERAGE STARTS PAGE 4

THE INDYPENDENT

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THEO WARGO

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER

MONDAYS IN OCT • 7:30PM • FREE
GAYLI: QUEER IRISH DANCE CLASS
Meet your friends at the queer Irish pub for a night of gaelic, pints and dance!
MARY'S BAR BROOKLYN
134 Kingsland Ave.
BKYN

THURSDAYS IN OCT • 4–5PM • FREE
LANGUAGE EXCHANGE
Join in the welcoming and supportive Voces Ciudadanas for their Basic English conversation meet-up. All ages welcome!
VOCES CIUDADANAS SPACE
475 41st St., basement
BKYN

OCT 10–22 • PRICES VARY (~$14 TICKET)
36TH NEW YORK LGBTQ+ FILM FESTIVAL
Founded in 1988 in response to the AIDS crisis, the New York LGBTQ+ Film Festival is celebrating 36 years of queer community and film. Screenings will take place in Manhattan and Brooklyn.
See full line-up on the Newfest.org website.

SAT OCT 12 & 13 • $32.50
NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL: *EXERGUE – ON DOCUMENTA*
Part 1: Oct. 12, 12 PM and Part 2: Oct. 13, 12 PM. This monumental documentary examines the making of the 2017 Documenta exhibition, exploring themes of colonialism, neoliberalism, and the interplay of art, money and power in Europe.
HOWARD GILMAN THEATER
144 W 65th St.
MNHTN

OCT 10–14 • SLIDING SCALE
DABKE AS RESISTANCE
Members of the premiere dance group in Palestine, El-Funoun, will be in NYC leading *dabke* workshops and teaching about this traditional Palestinian dance as a form of cultural preservation and resistance. Times and locations vary.
Go to amplifypalestine.org/el-funoun for more.

TUE OCT 15 • 6–7PM • FREE
BOOK READING: *AMALGAM*: FRANCES JETTER WITH PETER KUPER
Visual artist Frances Jetter explores her book *Amalgam*, connecting her ancestors' ties to the 20th-century labor movement through the story of a Polish Jewish immigrant and union advocate. In conversation with graphic novelist Peter Kuper. Registration required. Go to shorturl.at/4Vpvc to register.
NY PUBLIC LIBRARY
Margaret Liebman Berger Forum
42nd Street and 5th Avenue
MNHTN

WED OCT 16 • $10 DONATION ENCOURAGED
BOOK LAUNCH: *REPRODUCTIVE RITES*
Join author Sophie Saint Thomas for a reading and conversation with Synclaire Warren to celebrate the launch of her new book, *Reproductive Rites: The Real-Life Witches and Witch Hunts in the Centuries-Long Fight for Abortion*. Masks required.
BLUESTOLKINGS COLLECTIVE
116 Suffolk St.
MNHTN

SAT OCT 26 • 1–4PM • FREE
DIWALI LIGHTS UP ASIA SOCIETY 2024: FAMILY DAY
Experience a vibrant celebration of Diwali featuring cultural activities, traditional performances, art workshops and delicious food. This Family Day event highlights the significance of the Festival of Lights across various cultures and offers interactive experiences for all ages. Introduction to Diwali at 1PM located in the auditorium.
NEW YORK ASIA SOCIETY
725 Park Ave.
MNHTN

THU OCT 31 • 7PM • FREE
51ST ANNUAL VILLAGE HALLOWEEN PARADE
New York's iconic East Village Halloween parade is back! Featuring creative costumes and vibrant displays. Parade starts at Canal and 6th avenue and ends at 6th Avenue and 15th Street. Those looking to be in the Parade must be in costume.
GREENWICH VILLAGE
6th Avenue between Spring & 15th streets
MNHTN

THU OCT 31 • 3:30PM–12AM • $FREE-$20
VILLAGE HALLOWEEN COSTUME BALL
Costume parade and live bands. Miracles and monsters. Cold drinks and hot entertainment. Come see and be seen! Performances outside from 3:30–8pm free of charge. Performances inside 8pm-12am
THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY
155 1st Ave.
MNHTN

FRI NOV 1 • 4–8PM • FREE
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART'S FREE FRIDAY NIGHTS
Enjoy free entry to the Museum of Modern Art for this special monthly event for all ages. Listen to music by DJs from The Lot Radio, along with beer, cocktails and more at a pop-up bar. Reserve tickets, which are free for New Yorkers, online at moma.org.
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W 53rd St
MNHTN

SAT NOV 2 • 1–9PM • FREE
SUPER SÁBADO: DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS CELEBRATION
Celebrate Día de los Muertos with El Museo del Barrio for a day of festivities honoring traditions and cultural significance.
EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO
1230 5th Ave., East Harlem
MNHTN

SAT NOV 2 • 6PM • FREE
A LOVE LETTER TO TETA: A PALESTINIAN FASHION SHOW
Explore Palestinian culture through traditional dresses known as "thobes." Learn about the textiles, fabrics, and patterns that honor tetas in the diaspora and at home.
THE PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W 37th St.
MNHTN

SAT NOV 2 • 11AM–11PM • FREE
BROOKLYN MUSEUM FREE FIRST SATURDAY
Enjoy free admission day at the Brooklyn Museum. On exhibit now is *Elizabeth Catlett: A Black Revolutionary Artist and All That It Implies*, with more than 200 works.
BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Pkwy.
BKYN

TUE NOV 5 • 8 PM • FREE
LITTLE RED: A POLITICAL COMEDY
Join us for the premiere of *LITTLE RED*, a political comedy written by Tracey McTague. This short play runs for 40 minutes.. After the performance stay for a free election-watching party on the big screen until the results come in.
FREDDY'S BAR
627 5th Ave.
BKYN

FRI–SUN, NOV 8–10 • $35/NIGHT
BROOKLYN FOLK FEST
This festival honors down-home music, cultural diversity and shared memories. Talent from New York as well as national and international artists showcase folk, traditional and vernacular music.
ST ANN'S CHURCH
157 Montague St.
BKYN

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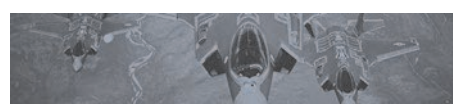

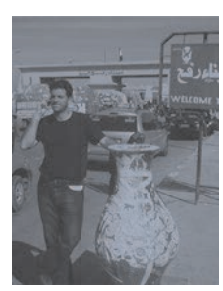

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6:30 PM: MR. PABLO LATIN DANCE BAND
7:45 PM: THE RED & BLACK MASQUE
8:00 PM: PERFORMANCES & AERIAL DANCE INSIDE

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ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

WHY ERIC ADAMS ROSE SO HIGH

HE MADE IT EASIER FOR CENTRIST DEMOCRATS TO DITCH BLACK LIVES MATTER

By John Teufel

In the hours after Eric Adams' downfall, as cheers rang out from open windows and the sun's rays touched our faces for the first time in three years, haters who had narrowly avoided becoming waiters played a timeless game: Who looked the most foolish in retrospect?

Was it Nate Silver, once famed for accurately calling the 2012 election, and now better known for predicting that Adams could one day be the Democratic nominee for President? Or maybe it was Bret Stephens, who from his lofty perch at *The Times* called Adams a "godsend" who would "save New York?" (Some fun trivia: Stephens quotes Adams complaining about how long it took the Buildings Department to issue certificates of occupancy — maybe the Turks were already in his ear.) And what about Al Sharpton, who went from an Adams attack dog against Maya Wiley to baptizing the mayor at Rikers Island, of all places?

Let's be clear: These hacks look foolish not because Adams fell. That happens. Lots of people liked Anthony Weiner at one point, too. (I didn't.) The Adams sycophants are laughingstocks because from the start it was clear that he was a grifter and a liar. During the campaign, he awkwardly pretended to live in his son's Brooklyn apartment, forgetting to clean out the meat from the fridge and the shoes from the floor. He theatrically announced an intention to receive his pay in cryptocurrency, that evergreen shiny object for idiots and scammers. Throughout the '90s, he ping-ponged from being a vocal Louis Farrakhan supporter who criticized a Latino politician for not marrying a Latina woman to a "conservative Republican," David Dinkins critic and Giuliani fan. He was endorsed by the *New York Post!*

Why were so many powerful political figures willing to overlook Adams' clear dysfunction? To answer that we can look at the most powerful politician of Adams' time: President Joe Biden. In February of 2022, with midterm elections on the horizon, Biden trekked to New York for a "public-safety summit" with Adams. Speaking directly from the NYPD's headquarters, Biden declared, "The answer is not to defund the police" but was instead to give police "the funding to be partners, to be protectors." At the same appearance, Adams called for a "9/11-type response" against urban crime, which he classified as "domestic terror that is pervasive in this city and country."

Such was the direction of the Democratic party in the post-George Floyd, post-Trump malaise, when heavily posed and highly cringe photos of kneeling in *kente* cloth gave way to billions more in federal funding for local police departments. As memories of Floyd's brutal murder faded, protests died down without Trump to serve as a unifying force and Biden's limp police reform legislation died a quiet death in Congress, Democrats across the country embraced the same police forces they had once promised to rein in.

At the center of this shift was Eric Adams. Third-ranking House Democrat and Biden booster James Clyburn claimed that Eric Adams' victory was "proof" that defunding the police is a "non-starter, even with Black people. In *The Atlantic* Democratic pundit Juan Williams authored a fawning longform piece on Adams focused on his policing career and fight against crime, castigating the "white liberals" uncomfortable with Adams' "working-class" persona (a truly spectacular assertion for a mayor who favored expensive suits, veganism and nights at exclusive social clubs). Another puff piece, this one at resistance-heavy *The Bulwark*, quoted a bevy of Democratic consultants and politicians extolling Adams' "centrism," pro-police politics and even his decision to bring solitary confinement back to city jails, arguing that "his victory could have national implications for himself and for the Democratic party." *USA Today*, in an ostensible straight news piece, announced "Eric Adams' Win Slows New York Democrats' March to the Left."

Adams rose to the top because he was a convenient way for Democrats to distance themselves from the Black Lives Matter campaign, which you may remember as the largest spontaneous mass protest movement in modern history — and one with which Democrats were never truly comfortable. Starting at the very top of the party, Democrats made their deal with the devil: They would ignore Adams' history and general weirdness to trumpet him as the ultimate foil to critics of the police and to pivot from Black lives to blue lines.

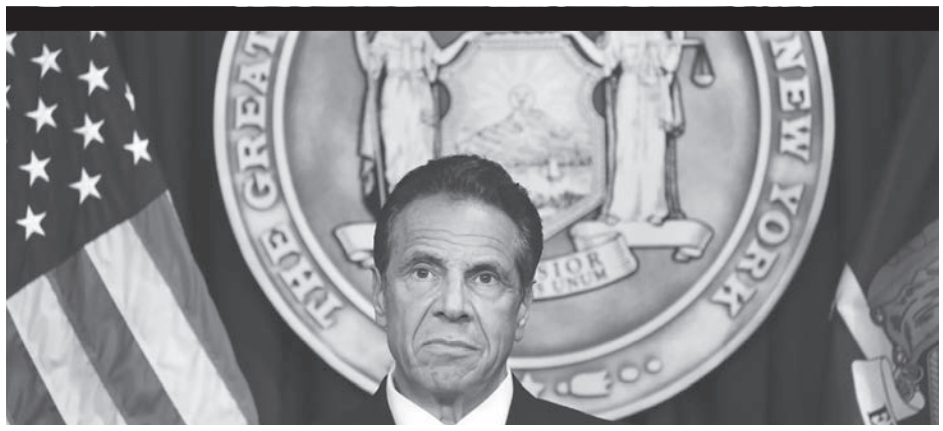
We can see where this led us. Every year since George Floyd's murder, police have killed more Americans. Biden increased federal police funding by the aforementioned billions, and state funding increased nearly across the board. Just last month when Kamala Harris was asked about police reform, she pivoted to gun violence, talked up the long-dead George Floyd Police Reform Act, and ended her answer by implying that many American communities are under-policed. By any measure, Black Lives Matter lost.

That's why Eric Adams isn't just another awful politician, or even just another corrupt one. His victory was a symbol — a Black man, a former cop, giving Democrats permission to throw overboard the millions of marchers, activists and protestors who voted for Joe Biden, in part because George Floyd's public execution sickened them so.

Adams would prove to be a liability long before the indictments broke. New York was a weak point for Democrats in the 2022 midterms, possibly costing the party control of the House, as Democrats fully internalized the GOP's crime talking points Adams had laundered into the national discourse. He and the president would go on to have a falling-out after Adams viciously criticized the Biden administration for allegedly failing to contain the migrant influx, which Adams claimed would "destroy" New York. New Yorkers themselves have fully internalized the near-constant fear mongering of the last few years and feel less safe now than they did in 2017, despite crime levels being comparable.

It is too early to say if Adams' downfall will have similar symbolic consequences to his rise. I'd expect to see arguments that Adams' personal corruption is unrelated to his general fascism. This is, of course, shortsighted and foolish, and not something most people would argue about, say, Donald Trump. There is by necessity a certain lawlessness inherent in law enforcement — when society walls off from criticism the same group of people who have a legal monopoly on violence, it creates a toxic, exploitative sense of entitlement. In other words, by accepting bribes and defrauding the city, Adams was just being a cop in a different context.

For now, let's try and remember the fools, cowards and freaks who helped Adams to the top even when they knew he was a scam artist of the first order, and for the worst reason: because they wanted to protect cops from accountability. Shame on them.



AFTER ADAMS, WHAT NEXT?

By John Tarleton

One sure thing in New York City politics right now is that Eric Adams won't be mayor come January 1, 2026. Everything else is up for grabs.

Adams has been indicted on federal corruption charges. Many members of his inner circle are under investigation or have resigned, or both. Dozens of New York elected officials have called on Adams to resign.

As *The Indypendent* goes to press, Adams is digging in. Speaking at a Bronx church on Sept. 30, he vowed to press on. "I need to reign," he said. If Adams doesn't step down, he could be removed by New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who has thus far has demurred on the subject

Whether Adams can survive will have a huge impact on the outcome of next year's mayoral race.

If he leaves office by March 28, New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams will become acting mayor and must call an election within 90 days to fill the remainder of Adams' term.

Next year's regularly scheduled party primaries and general election to choose a new mayor would still go forward. But the winner of a special election would have an enormous advantage heading into the June 24 Democratic primary.

If Adams leaves office after March 28, Williams becomes acting mayor and does not have to call a special election in advance of the June 24 Democratic primary.

Here's why that matters.

A special election would be a non-partisan three-month sprint in which high name recognition would be crucial. Unlike party primaries, all voters, Democrat, Republican or other, would be eligible to vote in a single ranked-choice election. In this scenario, the median voter would be well to the right of the median voter in a Democratic primary. For former governor Andrew Cuomo, this scenario is like dangling a lamb chop in front of a wolf.

Cuomo, who is still fuming over his forced resignation in August 2021, is reported to be lining up support in case Adams departs. In a special election, he could muster a coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats that would not be possible in a primary. If he won the special election, he could wield the advantages of incumbency — fundraising, interest-group endorsements, the ability to drive media coverage — heading into the primary to determine the mayor for the following four years. Yikes!

A Cuomo restoration could only succeed in a special election. Still, he would be far from a lock. Here are other strong contenders to replace Adams.

NOT AGAIN
Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo is preparing a mayoral run if Eric Adams steps down.

JUMAANE WILLIAMS

New York City's public advocate would have been the frontrunner in the 2021 Democratic mayoral primary if he had run. He instead insisted he had no interest in the position. The following year he primaried Gov. Kathy Hochul and lost by more than 40 points. If he becomes acting mayor, Williams could mobilize a winning coalition of Black and white progressive voters. But does he have the drive to fight it out for a job he previously disdained?

LETITIA JAMES

In 2018 James vaulted from public advocate to New York attorney general. Three years later her devastating report on sexual harassment allegations by 11 women against Cuomo led to his resignation. James could also unite a winning multi-racial progressive coalition. But how badly does she want to leave her current perch?

BRAD LANDER

This Park Slope pol was elected as city comptroller in 202l. Likely sensing Adams' weakness, he jumped into the mayor's race in September. He has shown the ability to mobilize an ideologically broad coalition, from affluent normie libs to younger AOC left progressives. But in a city that is two-thirds people of color, it's uncertain how well he would perform as a mayoral candidate in predominantly Black and Latino districts.

JESSICA RAMOS

The only woman currently running, this labor-friendly state senator from Queens would likely be drowned out in a special election. Conversely, she would benefit from extra time for grassroots campaigning that a wide-open primary race would provide. Ditto for lesser-known candidates such as State Senator Zellnor Myrie (D-Brooklyn) and Socialist Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani (D-Queens), who is likely to enter the race this fall.

DAN EFRAM

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

CITY HOSPITALS HIRE UNION-BUSTING LAW FIRMS

The New York City Health and Hospitals system's board has approved a $51.3 million contract for outside legal services that will hire some of the nation's most notorious "union-avoidance" law firms, the Doctors Council SEIU union says. The five-year deal, approved Sept. 26, includes Epstein Becker Green, which Health and Hospitals hired last year for contract talks with the 2,800 physicians the Doctors Council represents. "Doctors are concerned and surprised at the misuse of taxpayer funds to aggressively suppress health-care worker efforts to achieve a fair contract," the union said Sept. 28. The deal also includes Seyfarth Shaw, which has helped Amazon and Starbucks oppose union campaigns; Jackson Lewis, which has recently represented anti-organizing efforts by universities, national cannabis corporations and a concrete company judged guilty of intimidating workers; and Morgan Lewis & Bockius, which represented Major League Baseball during the 1994-95 players' strike and Amazon against a union drive in Alabama in 2020-2021.

DOCKWORKERS STRIKE EAST COAST PORTS

Some 19,000 East Coast dockworkers went on strike Oct. 1, shutting down 14 major ports from Boston to Houston, in the International Longshoremen's Association's first coastwide walkout since 1977. The ILA is demanding a $5-an-hour annual raise and "absolute airtight language" that there will be no automation, President Harold Daggett said. The union says workers start at only $20 an hour, they lose their benefits if they don't work enough hours, and two-thirds "are constantly on call." The ILA broke off talks with the United States Maritime Alliance trade group in June after port operators in Mobile, Alabama, automated registration of arriving trucks. "It's like cashiers and self-checkout. You don't want the self-checkout to take everybody's jobs," a striker in Bayonne, New Jersey, told *Labor Notes*. Employer organizations have called on President Joe Biden to stop the strike, but Biden said Oct. 1 that USMX should "present a fair offer to the workers."

NEIGHBORHOOD VICTORY
Chinatown residents celebrate outside Councilmember Christopher Marte's office on Sept. 24.

CHINATOWN / LES ACTIVISTS DEFEAT MEGA-TOWERS

Developer Chetrit Group has dropped plans to build a 1,300-unit luxury apartment complex on the Lower East Side/Chinatown waterfront that had drawn fierce opposition from the community. The developer, which bought the site in 2022 for $78 million, pulled out after Madison Capital Realty filed for foreclosure when it defaulted on an $8 million loan. "Chetrit's surrender is the latest victory in our community's years-long fight against the megatowers," the Coalition to Protect Chinatown and the Lower East Side said. Neighborhood residents had objected that the project, one of several luxury high-rises built or planned on the Cherry Street block, would drive up rents and might damage nearby buildings. "We were told that we were going to lose," Jihye Song Simpkins from Youth Against Displacement told a celebration outside Councilmember Christopher Marte's office Sept. 24. "In this town that is run by real-estate developers, we still won."

NYERS CANVASS TO STOP TRUMP IN PENNSYLVANIA

With Pennsylvania being the only swing state within a three-hour trip from New York, hundreds of New Yorkers have been going there to canvass for Kamala Harris for President. "We met a lot of voters who are anti-Trump," says Peter Hogness of Seed the Vote, which has been going door-to-door in Philadelphia with Unite Here's union's locals there. But many have no faith in politicians, and "swing between voting for a Democrat and not voting at all," while others are influenced by Republican attack ads, "which we don't see here in New York." The good news, he says, "is that on the ground, you quickly see the difference that talking with someone in person can make. They responded when I talked about how this election affects our ability to organize for a better future." Seed The Vote is doing similar work in Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Nevada. To volunteer, fill out the form at stvote.org/doorknock; to donate or help phonebank, visit seedthevote.org.

ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

ERIC ADAMS IS A DEADBEAT MAYOR

By Nicholas Powers

"This fool!" My neighbor jabbed Mayor Eric Adam's face on the newspaper. His finger made a thump with each hit. I watched shame and anger knot his eyes as he rattled the *New York Post*. "This fool!"

On the corner, on the stoop and on the subway, I ask people about "hizzoner" Eric Adams and see eye rolls. Or teeth sucking. Or head shaking. "Who does that? Who does he think he is? He's a Black mayor. He gotta know they watchin' him. WTF." After they vent like clockwork, there's a pause. The mouth puckers. I see a betrayal.

For others, it's a hearty "good riddance." A corn-rowed brother at the barbershop read headlines about the mayor. I asked what he thought. "Once a cop," he said, "always a cop. Had police out here giving tickets like it was Christmas." He smiled. "Adams can go fuck himself."

Fool and traitor. The street gave a verdict on Adams long before the feds. He promised policing with dignity. He gave us cops arresting turnstile jumpers. He promised us swag. He gave bribery and corruption. He said he'd look out for us. He tried to cut funding for city programs. He said he'd protect the people. He protected the rich.

Worst of all, he made it easy for racists to demean Black people. The stereotype of Black leadership is that it is incompetent, lazy and corrupt. The indictment hit hard because Adams talks and walks like us. In him, we saw a chance to have our real selves honored as "hizzoner." We could pull up to Gracie Mansion. Now, the second Black mayor in the city's history has fallen from grace, and he took us with him.

KING'S DISEASE

"I don't get it," I spread my palms. "This guy could have been the governor. Maybe president." I stared in disbelief at my neighbor. "He gambled all that for airplane tickets and a fancy hotel room?"

"I saw it coming." She tugged her eye. "Always flexing nice shirts." She play-popped her collar. "Always the cufflinks. Always the clubs and celebrities." She leaned over and spat. "He had too much to prove."

We sat on the stoop in silence. It's true. Pride and fronting were his downfall. I looked down our block, which at night was like a dark theater. Under the street lights generations of men picked up the same masks of machismo. Be tough. Be respected. When you have next to nothing, what little you have means everything.

Sociologists call it the Code of the Streets. Growing up, I didn't know the name but I knew the rules. When I went to clubs, I tiptoed around white Nike sneakers worn by brothers. God forbid you scuff one. You'd catch a "fuck you doin?" or a hard shove. Later I would hear how a fight broke out, and a man got stabbed or shot. Sure, pride kept you alive. Pride could also get you killed. Nothing absolutely showed pride like fronting in the most expensive, fresh and latest fashion.

That's why, against my will, I feel for Adams. I grew up with flashy uncles and flashy friends. I remember how they sauntered to a BBQ overdressed, wearing silk around hot sauce and daring someone to say something. They lived with chips on their shoulders. One perceived slight, and they'd throw a drink at a face. When I saw Adams strut in fine suits around City Hall, yelling at reporters for throwing questions or at a Holocaust survivor who needled him about rent increases, I was like, "Yep, here we go."

"Hey?" My neighbor waved her hand in my face. "Anyone there?"

"Yeah." I turned to her. "I heard this story on *The New York Times*. Adams met high school kids at his office. He pulled out his passport, telling them he grew up poor in Queens but always wanted to see the world. He told them to dream big. He told them to get a passport. He loved to travel in style."

A delivery bike sped by. A plane echoed in the sky. She looked at me, "And?"

"He's been trying to leave the streets of Queens his whole life," I said. "As a kid doing petty crime. As a cop. As state senator. Now as mayor." I sat up. "He was so desperate to prove he escaped, he set up his own trap."

She tilted her head. "Say more"

"Eric Adams," I said. "For decades, played the Cops and Robbers game. He thought he was the cop. He couldn't accept the truth. In that game, everyone's a robber."

THE PLAYER'S CLUB

"In Plato's Republic," I pointed at the screen, "Socrates tells a myth that every citizen is born with a metal that determines their role in society." The slide showed Socrates in a toga. "Gold was the rulers. Silver the bureaucrats. Iron in the workers. And he said that if a man with the wrong metal rules the city, it will be destroyed."

A student raised their hand. "That's classist. Isn't it?"

"Yes it is," I turn off the screen and start packing up. "Hierarchical societies have an ideology that justifies excluding the working class from power. Even ours."

Class ends. Students ask last-minute questions. When I get to my car, I turn on the radio and hear again about Mayor Eric Adams. More on the indictments, more questions on how he can run the city.

He can't. Which is a good thing. He hoodwinked working-class people of color — whose votes got him elected — into thinking he'd look out for us. Instead he rebooted the neo-liberal playbook. Instead he governed like a "Black Giuliani." Cops everywhere. Even $750,000 robot cop dogs.

Yet no money to help the homeless or the poor. He evicted hundreds of homeless encampments.

He blamed the immigrants, fleeing violence in Central America, for "destroying New York." He said the city has "no more room," and even threatened to deport any of the newcomers suspected of crime. Adams did to the immigrants what he did to poor New Yorkers; he pumped the fear of crime to keep his hold on power.

Driving home, I see abandoned buildings and trash, and whole neighborhoods that have no subway. So much work needs done in the city. It can be done with the new immigrants New York City's workers.

The radio says more about Mayor Adams. What it doesn't say is that people of color elected him precisely to be a man of iron. He was supposed to fight for us. It turns out, all he wanted was the gold he loves to wear so much.

SUE BRISK

THE POLICIFICATION OF EVERYTHING

ADAMS ADMIN PUSHES A QUEENS COP CITY COMPLEX THAT WOULD TRAIN PERSONNEL FROM 16 CITY DEPARTMENTS

By Adrita Talukder

On May 31 Eric Adams announced the City's plan to build a $225 million "Public Safety Academy" alongside the New York Police Academy's campus in College Point, Queens. The proposed academy will act as a "unified training facility" for 16 of New York's municipal agencies, consolidating and coordinating their training under one roof.

As soon as it was announced, the project was decried by critics as a plan to build a "Cop City" in Queens, linking the proposed project to the more than 80 police training facilities being built across the country; the most contested, and perhaps best known, being the Atlanta Cop City — a multi-million dollar facility for training police in militarized tactics to suppress future uprisings like the 2020 George Floyd protests — planned to open this December.

Set to break ground in 2028 with a projected completion date of 2031, the Public Safety Academy's roots date back to 2018, when it was first presented as part of the "Roadmap to Closing Rikers Island." After the city nominally committed to closing Rikers Island by 2027, it shared its plan for what would come in place of its theoretical closure: More jails.

The $15.6 billion Borough Based Jails Plan lays out the construction of four new jails in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, as well as a new Department of Correction training academy, which was first allocated $100 million back in 2018.

In August 2021, the City announced that the academy that was supposed to improve the training of corrections officers would be repurposed to train personnel from 16 city departments.

Unlike the Atlanta Cop City, which will host military-style training facilities for the Atlanta Police Department — which New York City already has — the stated program of the Queens Cop City is to foster coordination between public services and the NYPD. Or, in other words, to further deputize the public services of the city.

"We will learn from the Department of Corrections and how they are able to identify gang behavior within their walls," Adams said at a May 31 ceremony where he announced the Public Safety Academy. "So much information we can get from [the Administration for Children's Services], as they are early advisors when they see young people in dangerous environments. Think about the coordination we could have."

Among the agencies that will train in the "Public Safety Academy" are the Departments of Citywide Administrative Services, Correction, Environmental Protection, Health and Mental Hygiene, Homeless Services, Probation, Sanitation, the New York City Parks, the New York School of Urban Ministry, the Human Resources Administration Police, the NYC Sheriff, the Taxi and Limousine Commission, the Administration for Children's Services, Health and Hospitals, and the FDNY.

While permits have been secured for the project, no construction contracts for the new facility have been awarded yet. What can be gleaned at the moment, however, is that the Queens Cop City will act to accelerate the ongoing consolidation and expansion of the carceral state.

WHAT GOT US HERE?

The Queens Cop City's plans to train the city's municipal agencies alongside the NYPD hinges upon the notion of "public safety" being achieved through mass policing and an expanded carceral apparatus. Such a conception of "public safety" recreates the police as an entity deemed essential when responding to social problems.

The Adams administration has led the accelerated integration of the NYPD into the public sector as well as the decade's highest surge in stop-and-frisks, which overwhelmingly and disproportionately targeted Black and Latine New Yorkers. In 2023 60% of recorded stops were of Black New Yorkers, who only make up 20% of the city's population.

The wide reach of the NYPD can be traced back to the 1975 New York fiscal crisis, which the city responded to with a series of austerity measures. What emerged was a new urban neoliberal governance strategy premised on the tenet of slashing the social welfare net — and working instead to privatize public goods and invest in methods of social control.

These measures led to a surge in homelessness and untreated mental health crises in the '80s, which in the '90s were targeted under the policy of broken-windows policing, spearheaded in New York City by former Mayor Rudy Giuliani and NYPD Commissioner William Bratton. Pursuing the aesthetics of an "orderly city," Bratton directed the suppression of "disorderly behavior" and low-level offenses. This entailed more police on the streets and an increased police budget to grow the apparatuses of neighborhood surveillance.

Fuego, a member of the Bronx Palestine Solidarity Committee, an ad-hoc group of old-school Bronx organizers engaged in Palestine-solidarity and political-consciousness-raising work, sat down with *The Indypendent* to talk about how the Queens Cop City factors into the state's drive to maintain an unjust status quo.

"People have been on the streets since Occupy. Then 2013 was the BLM movement nationally. It's been a nonstop culture of resistance growing," Fuego said. "People's material conditions are unsustainable. Everything is unsustainable, and capitalism can't save itself. So, of course, the United States' answer is, 'We need to control the population in a more militarized fashion. We need to build cop cities. '[These are] all of the hallmarks of a decaying empire that's just reverting to authoritarianism."

WHAT COMES NEXT?

In mid-September the NYPD confronted and shot Derell Mickles after he walked through an open subway gate in the Sutter Avenue L train station in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The shooting of Mickles, a Black man over a $2.90 MTA fare — two bystanders (one now brain dead) and a cop were also accidentally shot — was a jarring reminder that more policing doesn't mean more safety.

"The police already have a bloated budget. But they continue to create narratives that make them essential," said Fuego. "They have made it so NYPD is an essential service. When you call an ambulance, the cop comes. You don't fucking need the cop."

As the struggle against Queens Cop City takes form, organizers are trying to apply relevant lessons from the Atlanta movement. Speaking to *The Indy*, a member of the NYC chapter of Weelaunee Defense, a network initially set up to fight Atlanta's Cop City, called for a "diversity of tactics" and pointed to secondary pressure campaigns against construction contractors that have impeded the buildout of Atlanta Cop City.

Priscilla Grim, a long-time New York City activist, is among the 61 Cop City protesters facing felony charges for their participation in the Atlanta protests. Drawing on her Atlanta experience, Grim spoke to *The Indy* about what other strategies the New York City movement could pursue.

"We can be building our movements by engaging in the processes that are available to us, but remixing how they're used," Grim said. "City Council engagement — just through that alone, the activists down [in Atlanta] have made [Cop City] such a toxic subject that people are either distancing themselves from it or starting to make it part of their campaign … Everybody should be taking over City Council. All of New York City should be there."

AGAINST COP CITY

New Yorkers march through Midtown in March 2023 in support of Cop City protesters in Atlanta. Now they have a proposed Cop City in Queens to confront.

FIGHTING FOR THE FIRST AMENDMENT

HOW RANDY CREDICO BECAME THE 'UNSUNG HERO' OF THE CAMPAIGN TO FREE WIKILEAKS FOUNDER JULIAN ASSANGE

ASH MARINACCIIO

COURTESY

By Theodore Hamm

"My knees are shot," says activist and satirist Randy Credico, now 70. "Right now I'm walking with a cane." As Credico explains, he spent his late 60s "jumping on and off a billboard truck like a 25-year-old Teamster."

Credico did so on behalf of Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder who faced Department of Justice charges that could have resulted in a 180-year prison sentence. In 2019, Assange was indicted on 18 counts under the Espionage Act for allegedly helping whistleblower Chelsea Manning obtain the classified information published by WikiLeaks that exposed U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Credico, a stand-up comedian who once appeared on *The Tonight Show*, first became a dedicated political activist in the late 1990s, fighting against New York's Rockefeller drug laws. In 2016 his close friend Margaret Ratner Kuntsler, then Assange's lawyer, introduced him to Assange. Credico explains that he embraced the Australian publisher's cause because he viewed the "persecution of Assange as the biggest threat to the First Amendment since Nixon targeted Daniel Ellsberg."

This past June, Biden's Department of Justice cut a surprise deal with Assange, who pled guilty to one count of soliciting classified information in exchange for a sentence of time served. After spending over a decade in confinement in London, Assange now lives with his family in Australia.

The resolution of the case was an unexpected victory for Assange's many supporters. Over the past eight years, Credico visited Julian twice in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, tracked the case on his weekly WBAI radio show and various podcasts, logged countless miles on a billboard truck, and handed out thousands of leaflets detailing Assange's plight to audiences from D.C. to New York City.

"Those of us in our social media bubbles knew all about Assange, but the average person on the street had never heard of him," Credico tells *The Indypendent*.

Plenty of powerful officials in Washington maintained a keen interest in the case, of course. Credico's relationship with Assange put him in the crosshairs of the Mueller investigation. Trump associate Roger Stone dubiously claimed that Credico was a backchannel from Assange to the 2016 campaign, causing Credico to testify before a Mueller grand jury.

In late 2019 Credico entertained jurors at Stone's trial, delivering his signature impressions from the witness stand. Meanwhile, Trump's Department of Justice indicted Assange. Then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo was also a powerful foe of Assange and his supporters.

After Biden's Department of Justice pressed on with the case, Credico decided to take more dramatic action. As *CovertAction Magazine* explained in August 2022, Credico's attempt to post pro-Assange statements on billboards in Washington, D.C., was rejected by Clear Channel, the right-wing media outlet that owns most of the outdoor advertising sites in the capital.

The owner of a promotions company then convinced Credico that a mobile ad on a truck would get attention, thus spurring the activist's crusade inside and around D.C. and through New York City. As Credico explains, "We'd drive around Capitol Hill or all over New York City, and I'd be jumping off the truck 30 times a day to talk to people. Now I need knee surgery."

In recent years Credico also organized a dozen or so "Stand-Up for Assange" events. In late 2021 speakers at one East Village event included Roger Waters, Cornel West, and Margaret Kunstler.

"I first met Randy in June 2021 at the People's Forum in NYC," Waters tells *The Indy*. "Although that's only three years ago, it feels like a fucking lifetime. He rode around in that Assange truck for weeks and weeks and weeks."

"My dear brother Randy was the major voice in America supporting our brother Julian Assange," says West, whose relationship with Credico dates back to their mutual arrest at a protest against the NYPD's use of stop-and-frisk in the fall of 2011.

TIRELESS
Randy Credico fought for eight years to free Julian Assange because he saw the government case against him as a grave threat to the First Amendment.

MOBILE MESSAGING
Randy Credico appears with the billboard trucks he used to spread the word about Julian Assange's imprisonment.

West adds that he "lost count of the events and podcasts Randy sponsored on behalf of Assange!" Credico is supporting West's 2024 presidential campaign.

By late last year, support for Assange spanned the political spectrum in Congress, ranging from Squad members AOC, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar to MAGA diehards, such as Marjorie Taylor Greene and Thomas Massie. Dissidents including Glenn Greenwald and right-wing populists like Tucker Carlson also championed Assange's cause.

Jesselyn Radack, a defense lawyer who has represented Edward Snowden and other leading whistleblowers, tells *The Indy* that "as [Julian's wife] Stella Assange noted, 'It took a global movement to get Julian out.'" Radack nonetheless argues that Credico's role "can't be overstated. Despite a government campaign to smear Assange and target his supporters, Randy's radio program, podcast, live shows, protests and rallies kept this case in the spotlight. Randy is truly an unsung hero."

WBAI Interim General Manager Bob Hennelly echoes Radack. "There's no doubt that Randy Credico helped to keep the progressive community's attention on Assange's ongoing tribulations, because he's lived through our turbulent times with an unflinching social conscience and a sharp wit," says Hennelly. Credico's current program, *Live on the Fly*, airs on WBAI on Fridays from three to five PM.

Credico's next activist work will be supporting Native American activist Leonard Peltier and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, both of whom have been incarcerated for decades. "I want to see them leave prison alive," he says.

While he surely will bring creativity to those fights, it's a safe bet that Credico will not be jumping off any more trucks.

WHY WOULD DICK CHENEY ENDORSE KAMALA HARRIS?

A SHARED COMMITMENT TO AMERICAN SUPREMACY

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Former Republican vice president and Iraq War architect Dick Cheney is backing Kamala Harris.

By Hamilton Nolan

When something like Dick Cheney endorsing Kamala Harris happens, it is possible to see the limits of mainstream American political commentary. Attempts to explain this occurrence using traditional left/right methods of analysis are sure to produce answers that quickly drown themselves in absurdity. Dick Cheney … is a man of honor? No. Kamala Harris … is the most right-wing candidate? No. Personal grievance against Trump? A softening of the wily old war-criminal VP in his old age? Anyone trained to see politics as a straight line in which the two parties are separated by substantial distance on policy will have to conclude either that Harris Changed, or Cheney changed, or the parties have shifted permanently.

Though I try not to write too much about day-by-day campaign news, this particular endorsement is a good opportunity to reflect on the way the American power structure operates. This is also a case where the explanations of the far right and the far left reflect the truth more than the explanations you will find on CNN and in *The New York Times*. The far right will shrug and say, "This is the deep state at work." The far left will shrug and say, "One warmonger endorses another warmonger." Neither of these explanations quite captures the underlying driving force in action, but each of them is much more true than MSNBC Republican-flack-turned-"news anchor" Nicole Wallace exclaiming "hell has frozen over" with this mighty realignment.

In fact, allow me to say something surprising: I believe Dick Cheney's own explanation. He said, "We have a duty to put country above partisanship to defend our Constitution. That is why I will be casting my vote for Vice President Kamala Harris." Before you scoff, please allow me to explain. Dick Cheney is one of America's best living representations of the fluidity of establishment power. Congressional staffer, White House staffer, presidential assistant, White House chief of staff, congressman, secretary of Defense, corporate CEO, vice president. Dick Cheney is not so much "a Republican" as he is "a man in power." He ascended the ranks of government power in a friendly administration, and then when that administration was gone, he got elected to Congress, and then he leveled up in another friendly administration, and then when that was gone, he slid over to running a major corporation that was wholly intertwined with the United States government, and finally he leveled up into the White House by standing behind George W. Bush, a more likable patsy who he could control. If Dick Cheney, a draft dodger who oversaw two major wars and happily caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in order to try to solidify U.S. power over oil, causes revulsion in you, understand that that revulsion is less about the Republican Party and more about the unblinking exercise of American national power. It's easy to think Dick Cheney sucks because he's an asshole Republican. It's harder to grapple with the fact that Dick Cheney did the work that this entire nation implicitly expects to be done in order to maintain our status in the world.

Dick Cheney would prefer lower taxes on the rich, fewer corporate regulations and a more conservative social policy than Kamala Harris would prefer. So what unites them? What unites them is this: a settled commitment to American global supremacy. That is something far more important to Dick Cheney, the human embodiment of the existing global power structure, than a few points on the tax rate or a little more diversity in government hiring. Kamala Harris, in her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, promised that "I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world." This is enough for Dick Cheney. In this sense, she is a traditional Democrat.

All of us who vote for Democrats need to understand what we are getting. Our feeling of moral superiority on domestic policy — We are the ones against racism and poverty! We are the ones who protect women! — is at all times floating atop an unmentioned sea of weapons pointed at millions of less powerful people outside of our own borders. Republicans are bastards on domestic and foreign policy, and Democrats are nicer on domestic policy and very, very close to Republicans on foreign policy. Even among Democrats the baseline assumption that America must have enough guns to exert our will on the entire world is not questioned. Kamala Harris may push for paid family leave, but she is not going to dismantle the United States intelligence agencies. Kamala Harris may raise taxes on capital gains, but she is not going to meaningfully slash military funding. Kamala Harris may protect abortion, but she is not going to stop sending weapons to Israel, remove America's drone bases in Africa, or give schools all the money they need and make the Air Force hold a bake sale to buy a bomber.

The harshest things that America does — its most uncompromising violence, its rawest assertion of pure power over weaker people — is always done overseas, far away from where we can watch it. For generations there has been a mutual agreement from both major parties to do what must be done to protect America's ability to militarily dominate the world: the gun that protects our concurrent ability to be richer than everyone else, the velvet fist that allows us to extract trillions of dollars in value from the Global South and use it to raise our own national standard of living. This commitment to maintaining the global order, people like Dick Cheney understand, is more important than all the other, smaller issues that voters get worked up about. This is the tree, not the branches.

It's not that Donald Trump has any ideological opposition to this commitment, which the Republicans have always embraced with relish. It's just that he's insane and an unpredictable egomaniac and therefore cannot be counted on to fulfill his role on this matter. Trump has found himself in a feud with America's intelligence agencies strictly out of personal vanity and prickliness. He is the sort of man who might undermine the CIA or screw up the Army's plans for the stupidest, most childish reasons imaginable. This possibility is more than the sort of people who live in that world can tolerate. They may prefer a Republican, but they need, above all, someone predictable. Someone who will not try to undermine the entire system. In this race that person is Kamala Harris. And so Dick Cheney and the people like him will support Kamala Harris.

If you are a Democrat who shares, at least broadly, progressive values, this fact should make you nauseated. Mostly, Democrats deal with this reality by not talking about it. I was at the DNC, and yeah it was cool when Lil Jon and Stevie Wonder were partying and everything, but a very important key to putting on a good party is "don't talk about all the dead bodies overseas." We, as Democratic voters, pretty much

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THE ECONOMY OF WAR

WHY THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX WINS EVERY ELECTION

By John Tarleton

In her acceptance speech on the final night of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Kamala Harris promised new investments in the care economy, support for workers rights, reproductive rights and much more. Not wanting the Republicans to attack her for being "weak on defense," she also vowed to a boisterous applause that the United States will continue to have "the most lethal fighting force in the world."

In a topsy-turvy presidential campaign — where there are stark differences between the two candidates on many domestic issues, and there is the likelihood that Donald Trump will try to overturn the results if the vote doesn't go his way — one thing is certain: America's warfare state will roll on.

The U.S. military straddles the Earth with around 750 foreign military bases in at least 80 countries. Spy satellites circle the globe 24 hours a day. More than 1,700 nuclear warheads can be launched within minutes by land, air and sea. Eleven aircraft carrier strike groups patrol the high seas and can project the threat of conventional U.S. firepower in any corner of the world.

All this lethal force comes at a very high price, especially for the taxpayers who have to foot the bill. The annual military budget hit $820 billion in 2023 — not counting supplemental spending on wars in Ukraine and Gaza – and will likely top $1 trillion in the next administration. Throw in the interest being paid on past debts incurred through military spending plus the budgets of other U.S. national security agencies like the National Intelligence Program ($71.7 billion in 2023) and the Military Intelligence Program ($27.9 billion in 2023), which together fund the CIA, and the annual tab soars even higher.

Altogether, War Resisters League estimates that 45% of Americans' income taxes go to pay for current and past military spending. For a worker who is being taxed at a 22% annual rate on $50,000 in annual taxable income, $4,950 of their $11,000 in income taxes will go to military-related expenses.

This in turn is how the United States is able to account for 40% of the world's annual military spending and have a military budget that, according to the Peterson Foundation, is larger than the next nine countries combined: China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Ukraine and Japan.

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In the summer of 2021, President Biden and congressional Democrats pushed Build Back Better, a sweeping piece of domestic legislation that would have invested in universal preschool, expanded child care and elder care, provided a $300 per month child tax credit for $39 million families, a tax credit for 17 million low-wage workers, investments in affordable housing and climate action, and much more. If passed, it would have done more to ease the burdens of poor, working-class and middle-class families than any government initiative in decades.

For its critics, the $3.5 trillion price tag was deemed an extravagant waste of money, and the bill eventually died in Congress. Left unsaid was that funding the Pentagon was going to cost roughly $9 trillion over the next decade. But only domestic spending gets described in hefty ten-year increments.

According to tables provided by the National Priorities Project, by reducing military spending 20% in a given year, we could hire 500,000 nurses ($64 billion), 500,000 elementary school teachers ($51 billion) and create four million childcare slots ($51 billion). These kinds of savings, if you prefer, could also pay for millions of public college scholarships, millions of units of public housing and so on.

Given these alternative choices, why do we seem to be locked into the well-trodden path we're on?

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For members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, being able to wield such god-like powers anywhere in the world is intoxicating even if their illusions of omnipotence (see Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.) often end in disaster.

For the generals, more war means more combat commands, more chances for promotion, more medals and ribbons as well as the chance to field test their latest weapons and military tactics.

For military contractors, it means more business and more profits.

For elected officials, there are more campaign donations to hoover up from weapons makers.

And for the media, war is great for clicks and ratings.

If there's one thing that transcends the red-blue divide in this country, it's the presence of the military-industrial complex. It's an inefficient way to do it, but military spending spurs technological innovation. It's also an important source of jobs — and an expanding tax base — for local economies, especially in poorer rural areas. Weapons makers source the parts for a complex piece of military machinery from as many states and congressional districts as possible, even if it leads to huge cost overruns that are covered by cost-plus contracts.

In Woodstock, New York, the town synonymous with peace, love, music and '60s-era idealism, the largest local employer is Ametek Rotron, an aerospace and military contractor that makes fans essential to the functioning of F-16 fighter jets and predator drones. Calls by local peace activists for the company to switch production to entirely civilian use have been rebuffed for years.

A couple hundred miles north of Woodstock, 20 F-35 Lightning II fighter jets are stationed at the Vermont Air National Guard's base at the Burlington Airport. The deployment has the support of the state's political leaders including Sen. Bernie Sanders, a frequent critic of bloated military budgets. According to the Vermont Department of Economic Development, the F-35 is responsible for 1,610 direct and indirect jobs, $222 million in economic activity, and is helping grow the state's aviation and aerospace industry.

By spreading its largesse far and wide, the Pentagon was able to sustain support for the $1.2 trillion weapons program even when the F-35 endured years of production delays and cost overruns that were subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. The plane is now widely used by the Air Force, Navy and Marines. Its maker, Lockheed Martin, also exports the F-35 to U.S. allies including Israel where, according to breakingdefense.com, it is the backbone of the Israeli Air Force. If you see photos of whole city blocks flattened in Gaza or Beirut, there's a good chance it was done by an F-35 dropping 2,000-pound bombs. In June Israel inked a deal to purchase 25 more F-35s with $3 billion from the Pentagon's Foreign Military Financing program, a pot of money used to promote weapons sales to U.S. allies.

BOMBS AWAY
The F-35 fighter jet.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry sailed a squadron of U.S. Navy ships into Tokyo Bay demanding that Japan open trade relations with the United States, or else. The Japanese, who had sealed off their society from outside influence for centuries, quickly agreed.

While modern-day "gunboat diplomacy" is rarely so explicit, the U.S. ability to project military power around the world underpins its global economic power — its ability to access natural resources, to penetrate and control new markets and bend pliant governments to its will. All that firepower can also be used to make an example of countries that don't fall in line (See Iraq 2003). As *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman once wrote, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist — McDonalds can't flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines."

American leaders like to depict the United States as maintaining order in an unruly world. But the distinction between the "global cop" walking the beat and a mafia boss providing "protection" to weaker countries is sometimes hard to see.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revived the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Europe. The Europeans' military spending is up, a boon for weapons makers. Two previously neutral nations, Finland and Sweden, have joined the alliance. They will have to retool their militaries to be NATO-compatible, which will require purchasing a lot of U.S.-made weapons systems. The war has also been a bonanza for U.S. energy companies, who have been exporting record amounts of liquified natural gas to Europe at premium prices since Russia lost access to those markets.

Ukraine itself is awash in tens of billions of dollars in U.S. weapons paid for with U.S. funds. Yet the government is trying to fund its basic operations by selling off state-owned assets at fire-sale prices. And new land laws are speeding the consolidation of that country's rich agricultural lands into the hands of foreign interests. Someday the trench warfare between Russia and Ukraine will end. When it does, a coalition of investors that includes BlackRock and JPMorgan is organizing a Ukraine Development Fund to guide that country's reconstruction.

In the Middle East, the United States has bankrolled a country, Israel, that doubles as a giant land-based aircraft carrier that can militarily dominate the region. The United States has also sold tens of billions of dollars of weapons over the decades to Arab allies like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It no longer imports large quantities of oil from the Middle East, but by guaranteeing a steady flow out of the region, the United States gains leverage over allies who rely on that oil.

China is the world's second most powerful country and is widely seen as a rising power that could displace the United States as the global hegemon in the 21st century. In the past century, it has only invaded one country — Vietnam in a brief 1979 border skirmish. Yet in recent decades China has still been able to expand its economy by leaps and bounds: It has increased foreign trade and soft-power initiatives like the trillion-dollar Belt & Road Initiative, an infrastructure development project that spans across Asia, the Middle East and into Europe.

Is peaceful co-existence between the United States and China possible? We may never find out. For the past decade, the United States has increasingly surrounded China with military bases in neighboring countries. The bipartisan consensus in Washington is that we should settle in for a prolonged Cold War II — with the military spending on China to match.

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U.S. global supremacy helps its banks and corporations extract more profits from the rest of the world, especially the Global South. The greatest benefits are reaped by the 1% in the form of higher executive compensation, quarterly stock dividends and stock buybacks for large investors. Ordinary Americans with pension plans, 401K retirement plans, mutual fund investments, etc., also receive a trickle-down benefit from higher corporate profits. Ditto for American workers whose jobs are fueled by American exports, especially if they have a union to help them win a larger share of the pie.

The cost of living in a warfare state hellbent on perpetual global domination comes with high costs, though. Above all, there is the human toll on those in the direct path of our violence as well as on the soldiers we send off to do our dirty work, who come home haunted by what they saw and did. There is also the enormous opportunity cost of all the wealth that is diverted into military spending. It could be spent on meeting human needs. Or on rebates to working-class taxpayers who have been buffeted by inflation in recent years and could use some extra cash in their pockets.

With our leaders focused on maintaining global dominance, they neglect what should be priorities — like our crumbling infrastructure and the need for transformative action on climate change. The idea, for example, that the United States and China should team up in leading the world in reversing climate change, the greatest danger of the 21st century, is treated as an afterthought.

Speaking at Harvard in 1990 at the end of the Cold War, President George Bush Sr.'s Budget Director Richard Darmon dismissed environmentalism, stating, "America did not fight and win the wars of the 20th century to make the world safe for green vegetables."

The view from the top hasn't changed much since then. Basically, we're on our own.

We can at least mobilize public opinion in a way that compels the militarists who run this country to alter their priorities. A big city like New York, with 12 congressional districts, a liberal voting base and a highly diversified economy that is less dependent on military spending than most of the country could help lead the way.

ERIC STENZEL

CAMPUS CRACKDOWN

IN THE WAKE OF THE ENCAMPMENT MOVEMENT, A BIG CHILL SPREADS ACROSS UNIVERSITIES NATIONWIDE

By Adrita Talukder

As the dust settled from the spring student *intifada* and students left campus for the summer, university administrators got to work revamping their student-conduct policies to safeguard against future protests of this scale.

As students returned for the fall semester, they were greeted with a new curriculum of repression. Now codified into policy are restrictions on where and how to protest, how to obtain the requisite administrative approval before protesting — lest all participants face immediate sanctioning — and restrictions on speech itself.

This summer New York University made headlines as it announced the settlement of a lawsuit filed against it last November that alleged the university had failed to respond to antisemitism on its campus — so much so that it was allegedly in violation of Title XI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

As part of the settlement agreement, NYU updated its Student Conduct Policy and Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment (NDAH) policies to reflect the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism — which claims that saying "the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor" is antisemitic.

"Using code words, like 'Zionist,' does not eliminate the possibility that your speech violates the NDAH Policy," reads the updated code. "Speech and conduct that would violate the NDAH if targeting Jewish or Israeli people can also violate the NDAH if directed toward Zionists."

■ ■ ■

The precedent set by NYU has already begun to take hold on other campuses. On Sept. 11 Barnard College issued an updated set of "Expectations for Community Conduct" that similarly cites Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and maintains that "Substituting the word 'Zionist' for 'Jewish' or 'Israeli,' for example, may constitute prohibited discrimination or harassment against those of Jewish or Israeli origin." "A softer form of violence, but more corrosive in a way, is self-censorship. And I think that's what we're seeing," Andrew Ross, a professor at NYU and the secretary for the national network of Faculty for Justice in Palestine told *The Indypendent*. "People are feeling the chilling impact of new regulations, disciplinary processes, [and] they self-censor. In an academic environment, there is nothing more corrosive and nothing more destructive than self-censorship. You're not only giving up your rights, you're enacting violence upon these rights."

The fall's slew of new restrictions would not be complete if they didn't address the biggest thorns in university administrators' sides — protests. On Aug. 23, just days before the fall semester began, Columbia released its "Guidelines to the Rules of University Conduct," in which it maintained that protests are bound by restrictions on "time, place, and manner."

"You can't have a university protest without first publicly releasing it and also sending a message to public safety that says, 'Hello, we're going to have a rally at this time, at this place,'" explained a member of Columbia University Apartheid Divest who did not wish to be identified. "If you don't do that, then your rally is not protected by the university, and then you can be disciplined for participation in it regardless of whether that participation breaks any other of the university's statutes."

The updates made to conduct policies as they pertain to speech and protest are but one aspect of the broader culture of repression that has taken hold on colleges and universities this fall. The very landscape of campuses has undergone a process of securitization. While the university actions vary, it is increasingly common to find public spaces cordoned off, freshly installed surveillance cameras to monitoring activities, campus police and private security details standing guard at every campus entry point, and stacks of metal barricades at the ready next to many buildings.

At NYU's Gould Plaza — the site last spring of the first NYU Gaza Solidarity Encampment — now stands a wrapped plywood wall, reinforced with metal barricades and staffed by multiple campus safety officers. A sign on the wall reads "Our Future Taking Shape."

As the university claims, the future is taking shape. And at the moment, it's being marked by a wave of measures intended to quell the pro-Palestine movement.

"What we're seeing is an attempt to obscure and repress in a more subtle way — just as insidious, but more subtle," said Alex, an NYU student organizer who asked to be identified by first name only. "It's suffocating. Essentially the strategy is to make sure students are aware, subconsciously or consciously, that they are being watched, so they should not act up. It's a way of pacifying the movement without creating the same media spectacle that would've happened if they continued to arrest people or suspend people."

Uptown at Columbia, these same measures of securitization have repercussions beyond the university — they've affected local Harlemites as well. 116th Street, a public New York City thoroughfare that passes through Columbia's Morningside Heights campus, has been made inaccessible to people who don't have Columbia IDs.

What happens at Columbia is a reflection of the increasingly militarized securitization of New York City, and it doesn't stop there. These dynamics are playing out across the country. Most notably, on the West Coast, the University of California's Board of Regents in mid-September approved a request from UC campus police to bolster their inventory with military equipment, including projectile launchers, drones, pepper balls and hazardous devices robots. This only adds to the UCPD's military-grade roster of weapons, which includes tasers, rifles, and pistols.

"That says a lot about the transnational power cordon that's being drawn around Zionism," says Ross, a student at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

SPEAKING OUT
Barnard faculty and students hold a teach-in on Sept. 23 amid growing repression of free speech on their campus.

■ ■ ■

Since the start of the fall semester, universities have targeted students and faculty for their pro-Palestine actions. At Muhlenberg College, Maura Finkelstein was fired in late May for reposting a poem by Palestinian poet Remi Kanazi on her Instagram account. Finkelstein, who is Jewish, is believed to be the first tenured professor to be terminated for anti-Zionist speech.

At Cornell University, PhD candidate Momodou Taal is facing deportation to the United Kingdom after the university placed him on academic suspension for his participation in a pro-Palestine protest at a Cornell career fair on Sept. 18. The university has suspended his F-1 student visa and denied his appeals.

"Yes, it's about freedom of speech, but that cannot be divorced from Palestine. The issue why we're facing such repression and such repressive tactics is because it's about Palestine," Taal said in an interview with *Democracy Now!* "It's because you're speaking anti-Israel and anti-Israel's genocide in Gaza."

On Sept. 24 a review of the City University of New York led by former chief judge of New York Jonathan Lippman called for overhauling how the university handles complaints about antisemitism. It cited pro-Palestine protests from the past year as justification for cracking down on what it deemed to be hate speech.

On Sept. 5 Columbia's Interim President Laura Armstrong sent a university-wide communication to affiliates, writing, "I believe deeply in the values of free speech, open inquiry, and rigorous debate. But those rights cannot come at the expense of the rights of others to live, work, and learn here, free from discrimination and harassment."

"We cannot stand by and watch this [genocide] happen," Columbia University Apartheid Divest responded. "The only appropriate response to that is to say we will continue to organize no matter the cost."

Adrita Talukder is an NYU student and member of the Student Liberation Action Movement at the university.

How We Ended The Cold War But Lost The Peace

Why Progressives Should Push For A Sane Alternative Foreign Policy

SPEAKER:

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Editorial Director and Publisher of The Nation
@KatrinaNation

Thursday, October 17, 2024
7-8:30 PM ET via Zoom
Q&A session will follow speaker's remarks

Katrina vanden Heuvel, Editorial Director and Publisher of The Nation, will mix history with first hand experience and a "front row" seat, to explain how US-Russian relations did not have to descend to their lowest and most dangerous point. She will lay out elements of a progressive policy of sanity, restraint and diplomacy that is not isolationist but realistic and crafted as a "foreign policy for the middle class."

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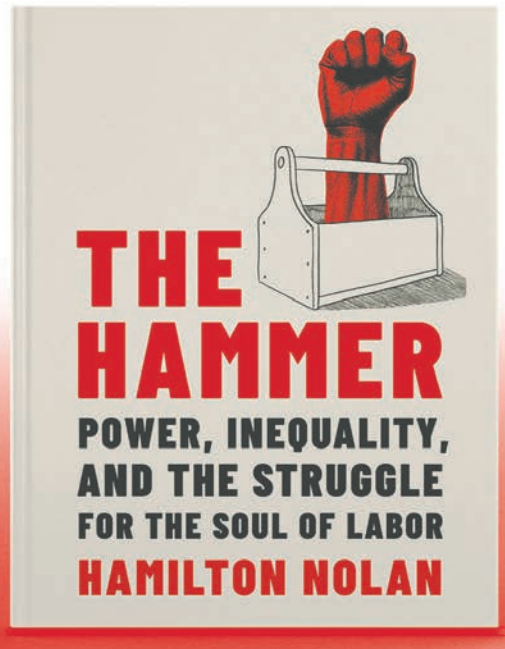

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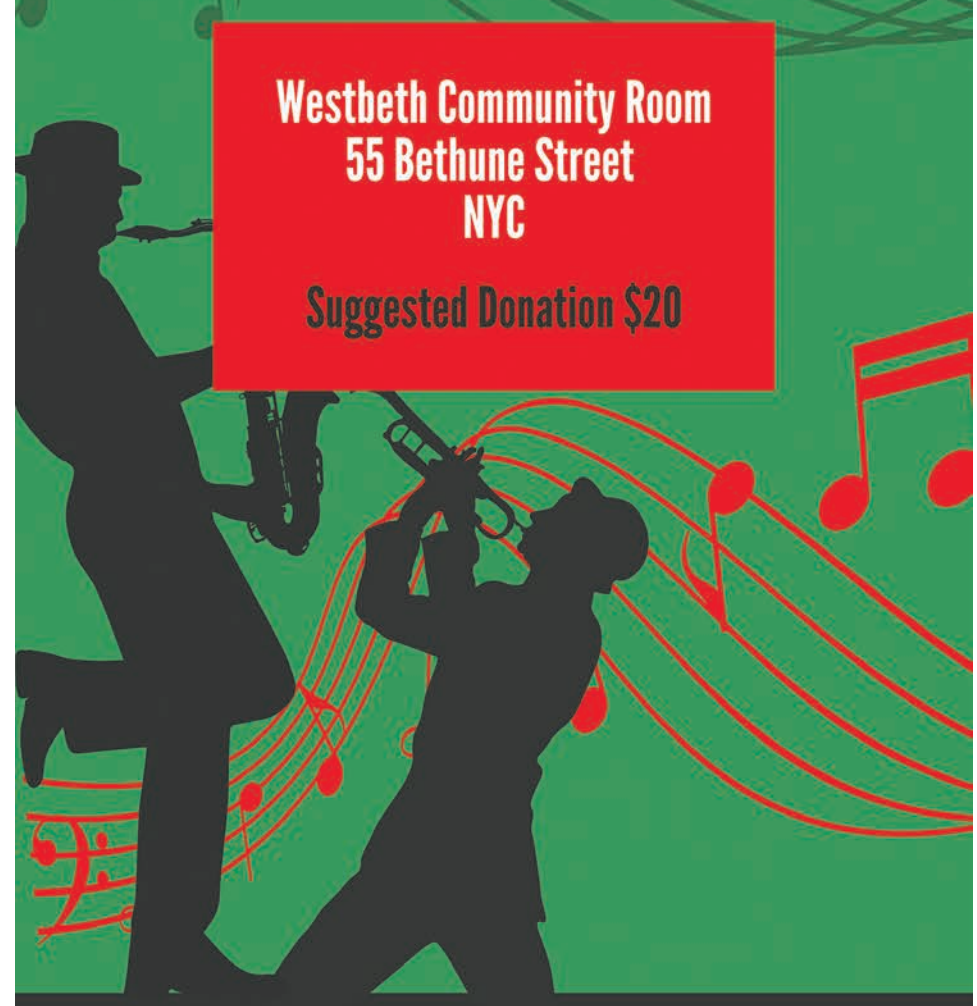

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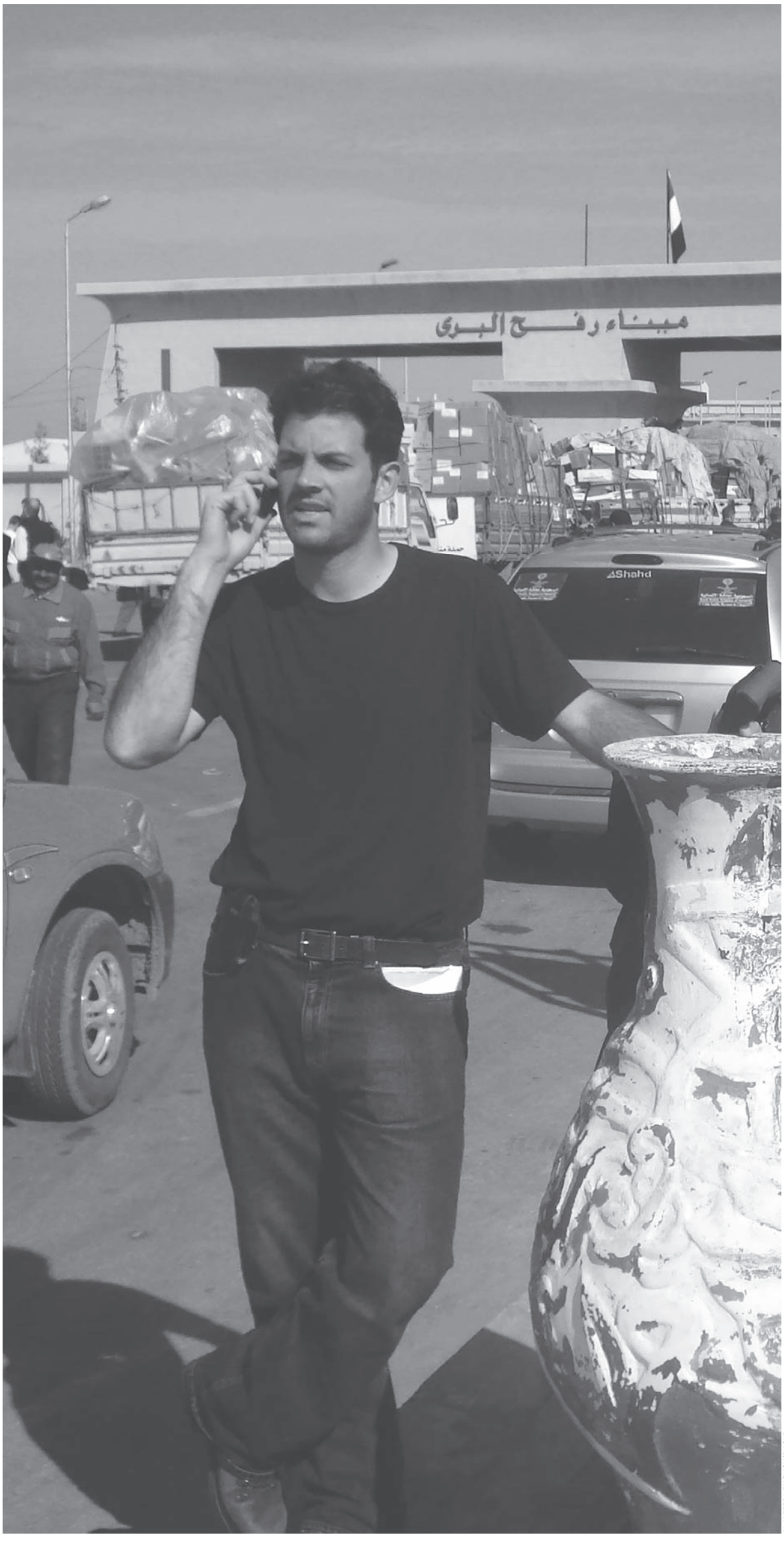


AL JAZEERA ENGLISH/FLICKR

By Amba Guerguerian

Before the Gaza genocide Rafah was a densely populated city of 250,000 on Gaza's southernmost border with Egypt. Its people were known for being particularly gracious and welcoming, which helped when their city became Gaza's last refuge before Israel invaded it in May. Amid the smell of freshly caught fish, you could walk through Rafah's crowded outdoor markets and hear the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer five times a day. Winding streets led to beaches where people would find relief from daily oppression.

A commercial hub since antiquity, Rafah was Gaza's only portal to the outside world since Israel imposed a suffocating blockade in 2007. The Rafah crossing allowed "Palestinians to maintain vital connections with the outside world and access essential resources. Its operation [played] a pivotal role in easing the hardships faced by Gazans," wrote Lorenzo Navone, a sociologist at University of Strasbourg who has researched the crossing for a decade.

Although they had to pay hefty sums to do so, people could traverse the Rafah border crossing to get to Egypt. Convoys of 18-wheelers would bring aid through the formal border crossing while smugglers would move contraband — and other inaccessible things such as fast-food carry out — through a web of underground tunnels.

Now, Rafah is destroyed along with the rest of the Gaza Strip and faces an uncertain future as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatens to keep its border occupied indefinitely.

At the end of last year, the world got to know Rafah as Gaza's southern city when its population exploded to over 1.5 million. The Palestinians of Gaza fled there because it was marked a safe zone by Israel — which was torrentially bombing northern Gaza. Its streets were packed with makeshift shelters; its homes full of strangers.

"Our building was completely full of people. We let families that had fled south stay with us," journalist Samia Alatrash, who is from Rafah, told *The Indypendent*. "We didn't expect they were actually going to invade Rafah."

As Netanyahu began threatening to storm Rafah, Biden declared that invading the city of refuge was a "red line" that should not be crossed. Israel did so anyway, destroying much of the city's buildings and infrastructure with no consequences from the United States. By early July, Rafah's population had plummeted to 50,000 as Palestinians fled to new "safe zones" designated by Israel.

ISRAEL & THE PHILADELPHI ACCORD

The 2005 Philadelphi Accord, an addendum to the Camp David Peace treaty, which normalized relations between Egypt and Israel in 1979, required Israeli settlements and troops to withdraw from Gaza (they'd been there since 1967), and it designated the Philadelphi corridor — a strip of land around 14 kilometers long and 100 meters wide that includes the Rafah crossing — as a demilitarized zone running from the Mediterranean to the Kerem Shalom crossing that links Gaza to southern Israel. When Israeli troops departed, it became the responsibility of Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (until Hamas took over Gaza in 2007) to oversee the corridor. Netanyahu now insists on keeping his military on the border, a breach of the 2005 accord.

"Netanyahu is claiming that they have to maintain a presence there and they have to control it to prevent weapons smuggling. But it appears he's using it as a way to scuttle a ceasefire deal because it's not acceptable to the parties involved like Hamas and Egypt," says Sharif Abdel Kouddous, a journalist with *Democracy Now!* and *Mada Masr*. "He's insisting on that presence which would be the reoccupation of Gaza… There's already some reporting that they're paving new road on that 14-km stretch of land and that they are building watchtowers."

From November until May 6, when Israel invaded Rafah, some people were able to pay to escape Gaza through the Rafah crossing. Since then, everyone has been effectively trapped inside Gaza — except a very few who have acute medical needs and some health professionals — because the Israeli military occupies Rafah and the corridor.

"No one is going to walk through there," says Kouddous. "There's people who paid and haven't left. There's people who have the money and haven't paid. The situation has stopped. I

Y TO GAZA

don't know people who are going through."

The movement of goods has also been thwarted. The Rafah crossing was the safest and most well-structured route for food and water delivery to Gaza before May; now aid trucks are hardly getting in from Egypt because there is no way for their goods to be picked up and brought to an area where people can reach them. Israel has refused to allow fuel to enter Gaza since the start of the war; therefore, the price of fuel is so high that it's very difficult for groups in Gaza to hire drivers and trucks to pick up aid from the crossing.

DIVIDED BY COLONIALISM

Rafah wasn't always a border city. It was divided for the first time in its 3,000-year history in 1906 when the Ottomans, pushed to do so by the British, drew a border through the Sinai Peninsula that cut through the city. The line was not precisely drawn until 1967, when Israel occupied Sinai after the Six Day War. When Israel withdrew from the Sinai in 1982 as a part of a peace agreement with Egypt, Rafah was divided between the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip and Egypt.

"We could never have imagined that an Egyptian officer would stand alongside an Israeli officer in Rafah to draw borders," a 60-year old teacher from Gaza's Rafah told *Middle East Eye* about the 1982 border construction. "Everyone was angry. We weren't even consulted about the division or asked for our opinion."

Families had to quickly choose which side to settle on. Most didn't want to live under Israeli occupation, but some stayed on the Gaza side because they had agricultural land or their workplace there. Within a year, locals began building tunnels, sometimes beginning in a Gazan home and ending in a relative's home or farmland in Egypt. The tunnels were first built to reconnect families, and they later became a popular way to export goods from Egypt to Palestine or to smuggle weapons and other contraband.

After a military coup brought him to power in 2013, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi began flooding the tunnels, citing weapons smuggling and Islamist insurgencies in Sinai. But some tunnels still remain or were built anew.

RAFAH CROSSING

In 2013 "coordinators" began offering their services to Palestinians seeking to enter Egypt via Rafah. For a fee, they would bribe Egyptian officials to place Palestinian travelers onto approved lists for entry from Gaza. Over time, competing coordination services drove prices down from $1,500-$2,000 per traveler to as low as $350 before October 7.

The beginning of the current war sent coordination prices soaring, with reports of Palestinians paying up to $11,000 per adult to escape Gaza. Some paid thousands of dollars but were never placed on the outbound list.

By mid-January, Hala, a company owned by Ibrahim al-Arganey, an Egyptian businessman with close ties to his country's military, had monopolized the coordination industry. The standard rate was now $5,000 per adult and $2,500 per child for people with Palestinian passports. The application process required having a relative wait in a very long line outside Hala's office on the outskirts of Cairo to pay the money in crisp dollar bills. Then, Hala gave the desired names to Egypt's General Intelligence Service, which passed the names on to Israeli security for final approval. If the operation ran smoothly, the person's name would be on the exit list within a few days.

Hala's rates are out of reach for most Palestinians in Gaza. While wealthier families liquidated their belongings to raise the money, others started GoFundMe campaigns. Some saw success, raising as much as $100,000 to pay for a whole extended family to get out, while other families drew little support. The GoFundMe pages that succeeded were usually in English, leaving the least privileged Palestinians the least likely to get out.

• • •

Those of us who have older relatives from Egypt grew up hearing stories about taking trips to Gaza to shop at British stores, to visit its beautiful white sand beaches and to see family. After Israel seized the Gaza Strip in 1967, Egyptians didn't feel comfortable traveling there casually. Nonetheless, during the Israeli occupation of Gaza, which officially lasted until 2005, Rafah was technically an open border.

BEFORE
Cars approach the Rafah border crossing in January 2009.

When Hamas wrested control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority and Fatah in 2007, Egypt closed its side of the border until early 2008. Hamas then used a bulldozer to breach the border, "allowing hundreds of thousands of people to cross," according to *Mada Masr*, an independent Egyptian online newspaper. "Hamas declared at the time, 'We will not accept a return to the siege cage or the agreement signed in 2005. We want a free Egyptian-Palestinian crossing.'" An agreement was reached between the two parties; the border would be open for crossing for a few days at a time and then closed for long periods.

After the Egyptian Revolution of January 2011, the crossing was declared "permanently open," but it started to be closed for extended periods again in 2013 after Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi was ousted by the military coup that brought in Sisi. This is also when the coordination business was born.

"Although the Rafah crossing is the only way out of the Gaza Strip," wrote Lorenzo Navone, "it has been closed more often than it's been open for almost 20 years. Bear in mind that a border crossing should work 24/7."

EGYPT'S COMPLICITY

While Egyptian complicity with Israel began when relations were normalized under the 1979 peace treaty, things got worse once Sisi took power. By 2015, Egypt had not only flooded the tunnels connecting Egypt and Gaza, it had also razed Egyptian Rafah to the ground, leaving residents homeless. And before the Rafah crossing closed five months ago, an Egyptian-state-linked company was making up to $2 million per day from its "coordination" business during the genocide.

A 37-year-old Palestinian in Gaza told *Middle East Eye* in August, "What Israel is doing is what it has been doing for a long time. But what Sisi is doing is unprecedented amongst previous Egyptian presidents."

Before October, Egypt and other powerful Middle Eastern countries were more closely aligned with Israel than ever before. They had "abandoned Palestine," says Sharif Abdel Kouddous. "But that doesn't align with the popular sentiment, so they have to pay lip service to Palestine because they're afraid of their populations."

Amba Guerguerian is an Egyptian-American journalist based in New York City and Cairo.

DICK & KAMALA

Continued from Page 9

just ignore this stuff. We may come out against specific wars that are particularly bad ideas, but we, as a party, have almost zero will to confront the military-industrial complex and its global tentacles and the way that it maintains, at gunpoint, the complex system of global economic power that allows us to live nice lives. I am not offering some grand solution to this bedrock injustice here. I'm just pointing out that Democratic voters and Dick Cheney are both on the same side of it.

The binary "Republican vs. Democrat," "left vs. right," "red vs. blue" method of thinking about "politics" is a very good way to protect and maintain the underlying things that do not change from administration to administration. This binary allows Democrats to feel happy and triumphant when we win elections even if the most consequential and brutal aspects of American policy toward the rest of the world do not change. This is one of those disturbing cognitive dissonances that adults mostly solve by waving them away as juvenile, unrealistic thinking — utopian bullshit for kids — a reaction which is, ironically enough, a childish way of pretending things do not exist if we choose to ignore them. Donald Trump is an awful piece of shit who should not be voted for under any circumstances, but that, of course, is not why Dick Cheney will be voting for Kamala Harris. Dick Cheney will be voting for Kamala Harris because both of them are committed to the basic premise that America will protect its standard of living by maintaining the ability to unleash more violence than anybody else on earth.

"So?" you ask. So, nothing. I give you nothing except the tiny step of being clear about what exactly is being offered in this election. It is going to be very hard to uproot this tree without acknowledging that you and me and Kamala Harris and Dick Cheney are all sitting in it, together.

Hamilton Nolan is the author of The Hammer: Power, Inequality and the Struggle for the Soul of Labor. *This article originally appeared on his Substack at hamiltonnolan.com.*

PUBLIC POWER

ONE BIG SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

KATIE PRUDEN

FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE
A child protester bashes a paper-maché power plant at a rally for renewable energy in North Williamsburg on Sept. 15.

PAUL FRANGIPANE

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Faculty, staff and students at LaGuardia Community College participate in a Sep. 11 town hall on how to transition CUNY's aging buildings from fossil fuels to renewables.

By Nancy Romer

In 2019 New York State climate activists won the most progressive climate law in the nation, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. It committed the state to ensure 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040 and legally bound it to get off fossil fuels completely by 2050, with 35% of the total CLCPA benefits to go directly to disadvantaged communities. It was intended to transform our state's energy system while lowering the cost of electricity and dramatically expanding good-paying union jobs.

It is not panning out. We are years behind on the pace of reaching the law's goals. The State signed contracts to build wind turbines, solar panels and geothermal networks with private corporations that ultimately reneged on doing the job. The State's reliance on for-profit corporations to meet the law's mandates has kept New York stuck at just 4% of its power being generated by wind and solar power. Demands for profits, supply-chain problems and high interest rates on loans put corporate renewable-energy projects on the back burner, while the state and the world continue to burn.

The New York Power Authority (NYPA) could come to the rescue. In 2023 a coalition made up of Public Power NY, the Democratic Socialists of America ecosocialists group; several unions; and the NY Renews, a coalition of over 380 groups that pushes for progressive climate laws, worked to get another landmark state law, the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA), enacted. The BPRA expands NYPA's mission to include providing renewable energy to the public sector and to low-income New Yorkers.

The New York Power Authority was a precursor to the New Deal, started in the 1930s by then-governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As a government agency, it doesn't need to make a profit, and it can float its own bonds to borrow money. NYPA could fulfill our legally mandated energy needs if Gov. Kathy Hochul would allow it.

NEW YORK HAS ALL THE TOOLS IT NEEDS TO LEAD THE WAY

On top of that, President Joe Biden's signature climate legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, will return 50% of the costs of a decarbonization project upon completion. The federal government will pay in cash to public entities, and in immediate tax deductions for private homeowners and businesses. How can we pass up a 50% discount to help save our planet?

One of the best features of the BPRA and NYPA is that they mandate accountability to the public — not to shareholders. Renewable energy can be developed at the lowest costs possible while still providing good union jobs.

Of course fossil-fuel corporations continue to put pressure on the governor and other state officials to slow-walk any renewable energy projects, especially those developed by not-for-profit entities like NYPA.

Getting the laws implemented in practice and building the constituency to push for that is another story. That's where climate and union organizing steps in.

Public Power NY has been the main organizing engine to educate and organize New Yorkers to push for implementation of the BPRA. Support from statewide labor unions has been crucial, especially 1199SEIU, the New York State United Teachers, United University Professions and United Auto Workers Region 9A. More recently, Public Power NY, the DSA Ecosocialists and unions have been organizing on the ground. Public Power NY has had lively and well-attended demonstrations and advanced a petition, phone-calling and email-writing campaign supported by progressive state legislators this fall. Coordinated efforts are afoot in New York City, the Hudson Valley, the Albany-Capital District, and the western and central regions of the state.

At the City University of New York, the Professional Staff Congress union's Environmental Justice Working Group has joined with Public Power NY to put on Decarbonize CUNY townhall events on 10 campuses, almost all in September, in advance of NYPA's drafting a plan for their scope of work. This effort is pushing for the most expansive version of that draft plan so it can decarbonize the thousands of public sector buildings as soon as possible and meet the state's mandated climate goals. It is educating students, faculty and staff to create a large constituency to push Gov. Hochul to expand NYPA.

Public Power NY is specifically demanding that NYPA commit to building 15 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030, create 25,000 new green jobs and fund training for them, cut utility bills in half for those poor enough to need that, and shut down polluting "peaker plants," which provide extra power in high-demand periods. They are those tall chimneys usually on the waterfront near low-income (or formerly low-income) communities that spew out the greatest amounts of health- and climate-harming fossil-fuel pollution.

Due to disinvestment since the 1970s in the public sector in general and in public higher education in particular, CUNY's physical plant — over 300 large buildings — is dilapidated. According to the CUNY administration's evaluations, only 8% of CUNY buildings are in good repair. That translates to massive amounts of carbon escaping from aging heating and cooling systems; health and safety hazards; and poor working, teaching and learning conditions. PSC members who work in those buildings and the students they serve have a lot to gain from decarbonizing and improving the physical plants. This is true for most public buildings in the state.

The cry for more renewable energy developed, maintained and provided by the public NYPA is growing stronger every day. We cannot allow great legislation to die — and harm our futures — for lack of implementation and support. If Kathy Hochul can't figure out a way to obey and implement the laws she herself has signed, then perhaps another governor might.

Now is the time to put the Build Public Renewables Act into practice, to enforce the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, and to make New York a model for other states to follow that shows what can happen when we push for economic development that puts the common good ahead of private profit.

Nancy Romer serves on the executive council of the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents 30,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York. She is co-chair of the union's Environmental Justice Working Group. For more information and getting involved with the campaign for public power, go to publicpowerny.org

AMERICA'S AGE OF INEQUALITY

Visions of Inequality, From the French Revolution to the End of the Cold War
By Branko Milanovic
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 2023

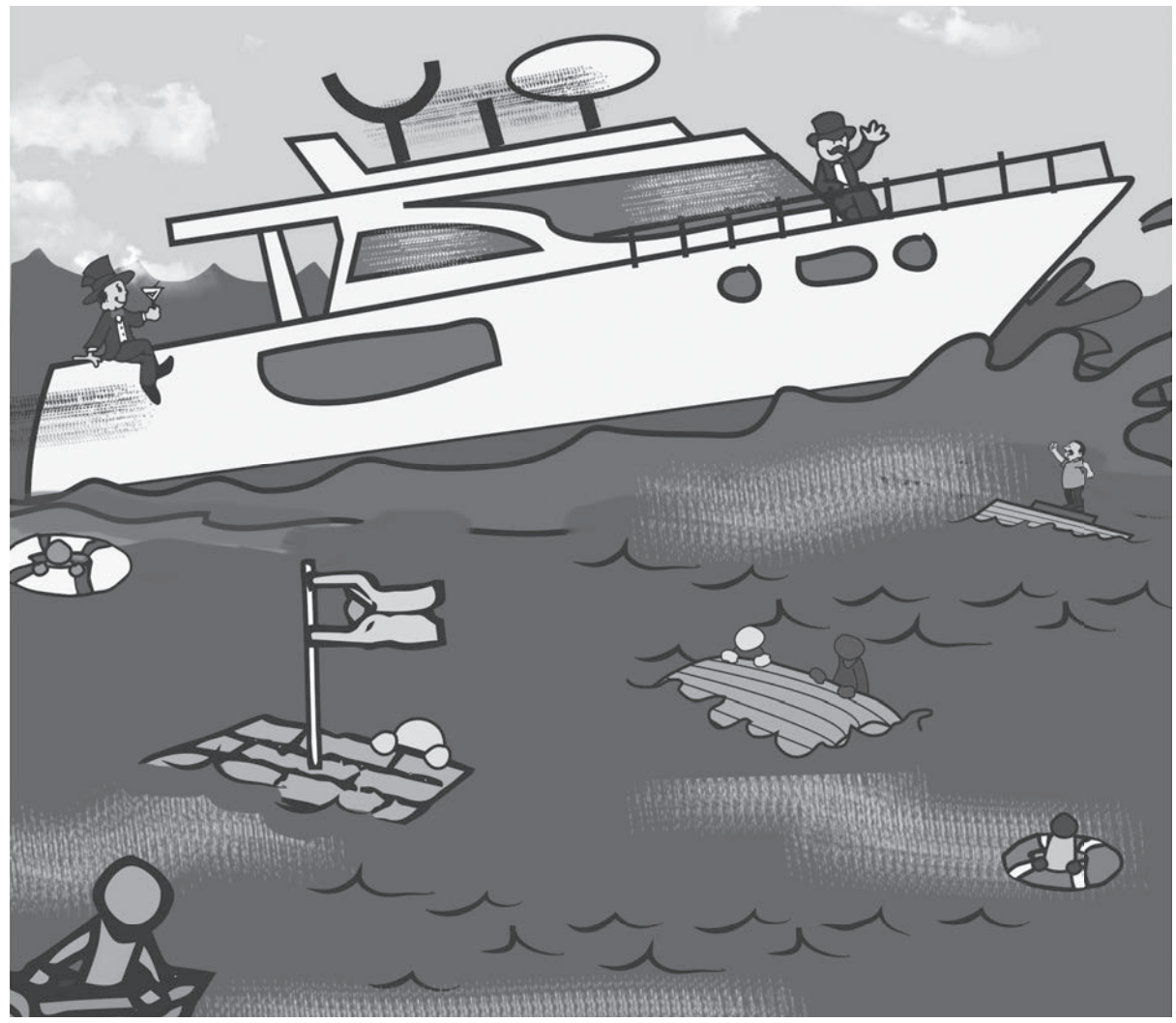
By Bennett Baumer

America's wealthiest tycoons have more economic and political power than any time since the Gilded Age of the late 19th century. Buff billionaire Jeff Bezos presides over his Amazon empire, real estate magnate Harlan Crow blows big bucks on Justice Clarence Thomas' getaways, and rich-guy-reality-tv-star Donald Trump is running to be president again.

Meanwhile, the bottom 50% of U.S. households hold just 2.5% of national wealth, according to the Federal Reserve.

The Indypendent chatted with Serbian-born economist Branko Milanovic about perceptions of inequality and how capitalism relates to climate change. Milanovic is the author of many books, including *Visions of Inequality, From the French Revolution to the End of the Cold War*, a survey of economic thinkers, including Adam Smith and Karl Marx, and their conceptions of inequality.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



GARY MARTIN

THE INDYPENDENT: Taking economic inequality seriously is not always a given. Why is that?

BRANKO MILANOVIC: The form in which the people were expressing inequality before and during the Bolshevik Revolution — inequality between capitalists, workers and peasants — kind of disappeared in Soviet economies. There was political pressure to affirm the notion that inequality didn't exist, and whatever ways inequality did exist were legitimized by the [communist] background institutions.

The U.S. was historically less of a class-based society than Europe, and the idea that everybody can [attain] the American dream was promoted. So why waste time on discussing classes? Everybody can become rich.

There was also an endogenous development within economics that everybody is an agent, regardless that you might have lots of capital and someone else has very little. You can be very skilled; I can be very skilled, but fundamentally we are the same because we optimize within given constraints, and that makes the study of inequality somewhat unnecessary. In *Visions of Inequality*, I called that period "the eclipse."

What was competition between the Americans and the Soviets like? And how would you compare it to the ideological competition now between the United States and China?

Competition between the Soviet Union and the U.S. did include space, military and so on. But there was another competition in the sense that these two systems were ideologically very different. In the U.S. you had and have private ownership of the means of production. In the Soviet Union, it was mostly publicly-controlled.

When it comes to China and the U.S. today, economically these two systems are not that different. China surely has a much greater role of the state. The state interferes in banking and controls all the key industries giving subsidies — which the U.S. does as well through military procurement and production — but they are not fundamentally different like the Soviet and the American systems. In Capitalism, Alone, I called the U.S. version "liberal capitalism" and the Chinese version "political capitalism," but they're still capitalists.

There's tremendous wealth in the United States. Obviously there are also deep inequalities, and people consistently tell pollsters that they aren't satisfied with the economy. Is inequality causing this?

That's a super interesting question. Marx says needs are not physiological nor fixed; needs develop with the development of society.

The United States is a rich country, but being rich means that the needs that people subjectively feel are high. In other words, the needs of a median American are not the needs of, say, the "median Vietnamese." [American] needs are much greater.

When Americans express dissatisfaction, their implicit assumption about the level of needs is fairly high. When you look at it from the outside, many people come to this country because they want to be rich, but once you're here your needs reflect what you see and what other people have.

So he dissatisfaction of the median person has to go up as inequality goes up. If the gap between the mean and the median is increasing, then the median person feels subjectively poorer, despite the fact that they might have two cars in the garage. So I think that inequality is to some extent to blame for this.

Climate change is the mega trend facing humanity. Can you envision a scenario with both drastically reduced greenhouse gas emissions and economic growth?

I was what you called a techno-optimist, then I started thinking about how the definition of capitalism in both Marx and Schumpeter is that the system has to expand all the time. And the reason why it has to expand is that if the people who are entrepreneurs do not make profit, nobody's going to invest. If we have capitalism we have to have a permanent sort of expansion to new areas of production. We do have a conundrum; how can we keep a system which is based on positive profit and expansion while reducing emissions?

For a reduction of global inequality to be achieved under capitalism, you have to have very high growth rates, especially in Africa, India, Pakistan and so on.

And that growth itself? A lot of that growth could be very intensive in emissions and contribute significantly to climate change. Africa is the only continent with increasing population — is Africa going to grow in a green way? It does not seem to me from historical experience that it is going to be very likely.

I've thought about how major asset managers such as BlackRock, Fidelity, State Street and Vanguard have such power. I would argue they have some kind of responsibility to safeguard assets from climate change. You can't invest in Miami real estate if it's underwater.

I tend not to be too optimistic. It may come as a surprise, but I agree with [Milton] Friedman's view that the job of capitalists or the managers is to make profit. It is their definition of their success. It is their role in society.

I don't particularly believe in self-control by the business sector when it is not forced by very strong taxation or fines.

Although they often aren't well-enforced, there are at least local laws mandating the phasing out of fossil fuels in new building construction.

This is basically a carbon tax that makes large polluters pay for their activities.

You should be also able to use money from such taxation to subsidize other activities that would be much better for the environment.

I don't think it's technically impossible, it just doesn't seem to me that we are doing it sufficiently.

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BOOKS

POWER-HUNGRY CHRISTIAN NATIONALISTS

Wild Faith: How the Christian Right is Taking Over America
By Talia Lavin
Legacy Lit Books; 288 pages
Release date: Oct. 15, 2024; available for pre-order

By Eleanor J. Bader

SATAN'S CHRISTIANS
Donald Trump is seeking to ride a rising tide of Christian nationalism back into the White House.

Talia Lavin's second book *Wild Faith: How the Christian Right is Taking Over America* (following *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*) opens with a bold claim: "The United States is and always has been a Christian nation." While she acknowledges religious freedom as a cornerstone of America's founding mythology, a deep dive into this notion, Lavin writes, reveals fissures between the ideal of church-state separation and the reality.

While Christian dominance has waxed and waned over our country's nearly 250-year history, Lavin reports that we are currently seeing a rising tide of Christian nationalism — some of whose Evangelical adherents have won seats in Congress, positions on the Supreme Court and roles in state and local government.

"All around you," Lavin writes, "there are laws unfolding: laws about schools, laws about teachers, laws about wombs, laws about doctors, laws about abortifacients, laws governing the gender of children. There are also laws concerning the way history is taught, lest anything come between growing minds and the big, grand story of a land chosen by God to be the fertile ground for his very own battle between good and evil."

ALLISON JOYCE

Wild Faith interrogates these policies and zeroes in on the doctrines that bind Evangelical Christian nationalists. Among the most potent are a belief in Satan, whose innermost desire is the sexual exploitation of children, making him a literal devil who tempts us with pornography, drag shows, and queer and trans pride parades. This is why, Lavin writes, the evangelical right is working hard to dominate what it refers to as the Seven Mountains of Societal Influence: arts and entertainment, business, education, family, government, media and religion.

For these true believers, this is nothing less than a broad effort to provoke "a massive social transformation of the world into the kingdom of God," writes Lavin. Turning the United States into an overtly Christian theocracy is but one step on this journey. Making large amounts of money — the notion that God rewards his (yes, God is always male) loyal acolytes with financial prosperity — is but one necessary tenet. Other tenets are political: opposing abortion by all possible means; opposing marriage equality and queer humanity; opposing no-fault divorce in favor of hard-to-sever "covenant marriages;" opposing "out-of-wedlock" heterosexual sex; and opposing government social welfare programs like Social Security, food stamps and Medicaid.

Fervent support for Israel is also foundational for Christian nationalists, who view the country's founding as the fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy. "Christian Zionists have spent more than $65 million in support of ongoing Israeli settlements within the disputed territories of the West Bank," Lavin writes. Palestinians are seen as a pesky annoyance, "an obstacle to the Apocalypse" — an impediment to Jesus' imminent return, in other words.

Perhaps this is why Christian-nationalist support for the genocide in Gaza is near universal, with nary a mention of the ongoing devastation that has left more than 40,000 dead and countless others wounded and traumatized. The somewhat murky rationale for this is grounded in the Evangelical belief that Israel will play a central role in Christ's reemergence: "Before the Messiah can return, the nation of Israel must be restored; Jerusalem must be a Jewish city; and the Temple, the center of worship and sacrifice in the ancient Jewish world, which was last destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, must be rebuilt," writes Lavin. But here's the rub: For the temple to be rebuilt, the Jewish people have to be "purified with the ashes of a red heifer."

Yes, really.

And that's not all. Trump has strong support among evangelical Christian nationalists, with many seeing him as chosen by God. Despite his obvious flaws, they liken him to King Cyrus, who in 538 BC followed God's order to rebuild the Second Jewish Temple. Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem solidified their support for him. As a result, this religious right cohort — 14% of the U.S. electorate is evangelical — is expected to cast ballots for team Trump-Vance.

It's a terrifying prospect.

Equally terrifying is Lavin's depiction of the ways evangelicals are trained to live in lock-step obedience to a vengeful and punitive God. Patriarchy is writ large, with a slew of predominantly white male "leaders" demanding wifely submission and strict adherence to the homeschooling of children and the use of corporal punishment to beat sinister impulses out of their kids, from toddlers to teenagers.

The result, Lavin reports, is the undermining of psychological independence, making it a short leap from accepting the authority of family to accepting the authority of a pastor and the political leaders they support.

Although *Wild Faith* does not go into detail about the array of right-wing think tanks, policy and legal organizations that promote an overtly Christian-nationalist agenda — and that dovetail with family and church enforcement of conservative political ideology — this is a small deficit in an otherwise chilling account of contemporary efforts by the religious rightwing.

Pundits and media prognosticators tend to discount evangelical Christian nationalists because their thinking is so out of sync with the mainstream, but we ignore them at our political peril. Lavin offers a cogent reminder of the high stakes of this dismissal.

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Gumbo Coalition with Special Guest Marc Morial (National Urban League). - Civil Rights leaders empower community

Narrative Shorts Series (Burn Out, The Fuse, How May I Help You, Artificial) + Adidas Owns the Reality (int'l prank)

SATURDAY 10/19

The Empty Chair - Inside the Fight to Unionize Starbucks Workers. + **Out Of Office**

The Edge of Nature (Sneak Preview) with Dir. Josh Fox. Climate Change Doc. Restore the land to heal ourselves post-pandemic.

Late Night Shorts Replay

SUNDAY 10/20

Campo de Santana (Early Show) - Brazil park with special niche

Fire Department, Inc. - Mayor seeks privatization to eliminate pensions - but not without a fight. + USPS election short

Limits of Europe - What is the cost of Western prosperity? Czech journalist goes undercover as migrant worker.

MONDAY 10/21

Ultimate Citizens - Immigrant children

Harvest of Light + The Pickers - Europe's fruit/veg supply chain exploitation.

TUESDAY 10/22

The History of Work
The Presidents' Tailor
The Cooperators + Works for All - Co-ops from Ohio to NYC
Revolutionary Song - Chilean

WEDNESDAY 10/23

The Interview at Sea - Hybrid
Construction Workers, Our Heroic Comrades - '60s Greece
Bargaining Forward (CUPE)
We Are Not Machines - NJ temp

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